

A Call to True Discipleship

When Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, heard from the others that Jesus had risen from the dead, he made a bold statement:

John 20:25 (ESV)

Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

At first glance, we may assume Thomas was doubting without reason. But his desire wasn't to mock—he needed evidence that the Jesus who appeared was the same Jesus who was crucified. He wanted confirmation of the resurrected Christ, the One who bore the marks of suffering and death.

When Jesus later appeared to him and showed him the scars, Thomas believed and proclaimed:

John 20:28 (ESV)

My Lord and my God!

This confession was one of the strongest declarations of Jesus' divinity in the New Testament. But notice what led Thomas to that confession: it was the wounds of Jesus—the marks of His suffering.

The Cost of Following Jesus

Jesus makes the cost of discipleship crystal clear:

Luke 9:23 (ESV)

If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.

This verse outlines the daily discipline of a believer:

Deny self – Abandon personal desires and submit to God's will.

Take up your cross – Be willing to suffer and even die if necessary.

Follow Jesus – Imitate His life, character, and mission.

The “cross” is not a symbol of inconvenience. In the Roman world, the cross was an instrument of death. To carry your cross is to embrace a life of sacrificial obedience, even to the point of suffering for righteousness' sake.

What Is the Cross in the Life of a Believer?

The cross represents trials, persecution, rejection, and loss that a Christian endures because of their faith.

2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Persecution is not a probability—it is a promise. The moment you decide to live for Christ, a spiritual war begins. The enemy resists your every step, and the world will not applaud your transformation.

Many new believers are surprised when opposition arises after they commit to Christ. They might experience:

Family rejection (Matthew 10:34–36)

Financial hardship

Loss of friends or reputation

Spiritual battles

Slander or mockery

Jesus didn't hide this reality. He told His followers plainly:

John 15:18–20 (ESV)

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you... If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.

Testing of Faith Is Inevitable

Every genuine follower of Christ will have their faith tested.

1 Peter 4:12–14 (ESV)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you... But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings... If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

These trials are not punishments—they are refining fires that produce spiritual maturity:

James 1:2-4 (ESV)

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness...

Romans 5:3-5 explains this further, teaching that suffering produces endurance, character, and hope. God uses trials to shape us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Biblical Examples of the Wilderness Journey

The Israelites did not enter the Promised Land immediately after leaving Egypt. God led them through the wilderness to test, humble, and teach them.

Deuteronomy 8:2 (ESV)

And you shall remember the whole way that the LORD your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your

heart...

Likewise, God allows seasons of dryness, difficulty, or delay—not to destroy us—but to prepare us for what He has promised. A Christian's life will often go through a wilderness before entering Canaan (the fullness of God's promises).

The Marks of a True Disciple

If we claim to follow Jesus, our lives must bear marks of His suffering—not physical wounds, but real, observable signs of sacrifice and obedience. Paul understood this deeply.

Galatians 6:17 (ESV)

From now on let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

What about us?

Where have you suffered because of your faith?

Where have you been mocked, rejected, or persecuted?

What have you lost for the sake of obedience to Christ?

If there are no scars, we must ask ourselves honestly: Are we truly carrying the cross? Or have we settled for a comfortable Christianity that costs us nothing?

Self-Examination: Religion or Relationship?

Paul encourages us:

2 Corinthians 13:5 (ESV)

Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...

Are you following Jesus—or just a tradition? Have you truly left

Egypt (the world) or are you simply singing hymns from the comfort of Pharaoh's court?

Jesus warned that many would think they followed Him, but He would say, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:21-23). The fruit of our lives must reflect the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

Hope in the Midst of Suffering

Let us not forget that suffering is not the end of the story.

1 Peter 5:10 (ESV)

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace... will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

God is working through your pain for a glorious purpose. You may be rejected now, but you will be crowned later. The cross always comes before the crown.

Final Charge

So dear brother, dear sister:

If you have taken up your cross—stay the course.

If you're being mocked or hated—rejoice.

If you feel discouraged—be strengthened.

You are walking the narrow path that leads to life.

And if you realize today that you've been wearing the name of Christ without carrying His cross—there's grace for you. Repent, and follow Him wholeheartedly.

Let your life declare, like Thomas did—not out of doubt but from a place of deep conviction:

“My Lord and my God!”

Be blessed and strengthened in Christ.

ARE YOU REALLY FOLLOWING JESUS?

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